12/21/1965
L.A. Times

# Disney's New Recreation Paradise

## Ski Bowls, Trails, Lakes to Be Exploited in Mineral King Project

BY PHILIP FRADKIN
Times Staff Writer

The glitter of Mineral King, where miners in the late 1800s failed to find the riches to match the boastful name, is snow these days.

The vast, snow-filled alpine bowls and the valley floor are deserted now. Summer residents have left, and few people venture into the rugged, isolated area in winter.

But this will change soon.

The award of a Forest Service lease to Walt Disney Productions last Friday opens up the valley, 55 miles east of Visalia in Tulare County, for development as a winter and summer resort which 2.5 million persons are expected to visit annually by the mid-1970s.

### Early Start

Surveyors and engineers were dispatched to Mineral King by Disney soon after the award of the lease was announced so that there could be an early start on construction.

However, for skiers who want to sample what could be the most outstanding ski area in North America, adequate access will not be a reality for at least five years.

For summertime visitors, travel over the 25-mile road from Hammond, which seems determined to curve back on itself but never completely does, will be somewhat easier.

But in either case, the trip will be worth it.

### Stocked Streams

At the end of the road there is a recreation paradise: unlimited alpine bowls for skiing, High Sierra hiking trails and mountain lakes and streams stocked with trout.

Willy Schaeffler, director of ski events at the Squaw Valley Olympics and ski consultant to Disney, said, "Mineral King has 12 major bowls, each one offering as much ski terrain as all of Squaw Valley.

Summertime view from Aspen Flat of Mineral King area, which is to be developed as a winter and summer resort. In the background, Farewell Gap, which would be three-mile ski run.
Times photo

"There are over 30 miles of beginner and intermediate trails as well as unlimited advance and expert skiing terrain. All of this is of European-type skiing not found anywhere else in the United States."

The 20 lakes in the area can all be reached by one-day hiking or horseback trips. They range from 3/4 acre to the 29.7 acres of Lower Franklin Lake. Eastern brook trout and rainbow predominate.

And for the sedentary type, there is the clear mountain air at the 8,000-foot level of the valley floor and views of mountains on three sides reaching from 10,000 to 12,000 feet.

In this natural setting, Disney plans to spend between $35 and $40 million on the ultimate development which will not be realized until the winter of 1975-1976.

"This will be a recreation project, not an entertainment center," Disney said. Under present plans, no cars will be allowed in the valley.

Up to 20,000 persons a day would be able to ski on the 14 ski lifts. The vertical drop from all the bowls is more than 3,000 feet and some runs will be 4 miles long.

Under normal conditions, there is snow on the slopes from November through April. The average snow depth for the last five years at the time of a mid-winter survey was 5 1/2 feet.

Schaeffler compares the area with St. Anton, Zurs and Lech in Austria or Val d'Isere and Courchevel in France.

Disney plans to build two large hotels, dormitory facilities, cabins, up to 10 restaurants and cafeterias, an ice skating rink, convenience shops, conference center, hospital and heliport.

Despite these elaborate plans, the problem of access still remains.

Improvement of the road, which in spots permits only one-way traffic, has halted various plans for development of Mineral King during the last 20 years.

### Crash Program

Neither state highway nor National Park officials, who would be responsible for construction of the 11 miles within the boundaries of Sequoia National Park, have any plans drawn for a new road.

L. S. Van Voorhis, assistant district engineer in charge of planning, estimates that a two-lane road will cost about $10 million. Under a "crash" program, it would take at least five years to make such a road a reality.

Until it is built, the 245-mile drive will remain slightly under six hours from Los Angeles in the summer.

Lack of an all-weather road will hold down use of the area in winter. Present plans call for either a helicopter service or combination bus and snow cat trip from Three Rivers, pending completion of the road.

Disney originally had planned to have three ski

Please Turn to Pg. 12, Col. 1

2023.009.002a

# RESORT PROJECT

**Continued from First Page**

lifts installed for the winnter of 1966-1967. However, with a 2½-month delay in the award of the lease, the original schedule was disrupted and there presently is no estimate when the first lifts will be completed.

Six bids were received by the supervisor of the Sequoia National Forest by the Aug. 31 deadline. The bidders were narrowed down to Disney and Robert Brandt, Beverly Hills land developer, and, in an unusual procedure, first Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman and then a three-man board reviewed the two bids.

The history of Mineral King goes back to 1879 when the area was opened up for large-scale mining operations with completion of the first road which cost $100,000 to build.

The early promise of an abundance of gold, silver, lead, copper and zinc was never fulfilled and by 1885, when there were 2,000 registered voters in the valley, mining operations began to shut down.

From that day to the present, the beauties of Mineral King were left untouched to be enjoyed by retired miners, summer residents and a few tourists, campers and hikers who wandered off the beaten track.

Miss Elsie Crowley, who has spent every summer in the valley since she was taken there a a baby in 1889, recalls, "The first skiers were miners who skied down from the mines above to the front door of the valley's two saloons."

She added, "If they keep the natural beauty and don't interfere with our cabin rights, it will be a wonderful thing. So many people will be able to enjoy the grandeur of these high peaks."

## Banker Heads Council

VISTA—John Cosh, a banker, has been elected president of the Greater San Luis Rey Area Planning and Development Council.

2023.009.0026